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Subject: No warrant worries: Texas' DPS says it's safe to apply for voter ID

No warrant worries: Texas' DPS says it's safe to apply for voter ID

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If you're confused about voter ID in Texas, you're not alone.

The Texas Department of Public Safety issues the IDs, and folks there are confused, too.

More than one DPS employee said this week that if you can't pass a warrant check, you can't walk in and get a voter ID. If you try, you won't walk back out.

After a kerfluffle with lawyers and a senator, a DPS spokesman said Thursday that warrant checks won't apply to election ID certificates, the new free IDs created for voters who haven't bought a current driver's license, official state ID, passport or handgun permit.

The new ID law has put troopers in a tough spot: They must issue free IDs to help everyone vote, even those who also face traffic court or owe fines, fees, surcharges or a criminal amount of tolls.

Until now, anyone behind on paying a traffic fine didn't dare set foot in the driver's license office.

But the same troopers sworn to arrest fugitives and scofflaws also now are asked to help get Texans ID'd to vote.

If those roles conflicted, the DPS has clarified which comes first.

The policy of checking for warrants on any walk-in license renewal or address change "only applies to driver licenses" and the more formal ID cards the state sells, DPS spokesman Tom Vinger wrote by email: "It does not apply to Election Identification Certificates."

Just the day before, Vinger had called it "routine" to check anyone at license offices for warrants.

This means Aunt Martha can still get an election ID certificate, even if she never took care of that \$300 ticket for the right turn on red in Dalworthington Gardens, or if her driving privileges were canceled years ago.

State Sen. Rodney Ellis, D-Houston, had asked the DPS some pointed questions in a Thursday letter.

"I understand and respect DPS's role as a law enforcement agency," Ellis wrote.

"At the same time, I hope you can appreciate that the threat of possible arrest for merely seeking to exercise one's right to vote will inevitably have a detrimental impact on ... [voters' ability] to have their voice heard."

With voting now a month away in a minor state election and major party primaries coming up in five months,

Basically, you need a current or just-expired photo ID with a name that “substantially” matches your voter card.

Guidelines say this leaves leeway for a different middle/maiden name or a contraction such as “Lupe,” but not for different names, such as those due to divorce or marriage.

If you don’t drive or pack a handgun, you’ll need one of the new election ID certificates.

Hey, we can’t let just anybody vote.

Bud Kennedy's column appears Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. 817-390-7538 Twitter: [@BudKennedy](https://twitter.com/BudKennedy)

Read more here: <http://www.star-telegram.com/2013/09/19/5177802/no-warrant-worries-texas-dps-says.html?rh=1#storylink=cpy>

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